

CLAIMS

1. A process for determining methyl ter butyl ether (MTBE) vapours, in concentrations equal to or higher than 0.1 ppm, in the ground and overlying atmosphere comprising:

5 a) adopting a series of MTBE vapour sensors of which at least one in the earth, equipped with a membrane permeable to gases and impermeable to water, and at least one in the air on the surface of the ground, these sensors consisting of

10 - a sensitive element made of a semi-conductor metal oxide containing platinum;

- a heater capable of bringing the temperature of said sensitive element to a range of 300 and 15 500°C;

20 b) - continuously observing the resistance variations of the sensitive elements by interaction with MTBE,

- comparing the signals emitted by the sensor in the earth and the sensor in the air on the ground-surface;

- evaluating on the basis of this comparison the presence and concentration of MTBE in the surface layers or depths of the ground and in the atmosphere above the ground itself.

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2. The process according to claim 1, characterized in that the sensitive element is produced with tin oxide.

3. A device for determining methyl ter butyl ether (MTBE) vapours comprising:

a) a series of sensors of MTBE vapours consisting of a sensitive element produced with

- a 40 micron layer of semiconductor metal oxide containing 1% by weight of platinum,

10 - a heater capable of bringing the temperature of said sensitive element to a range of 300 to 500°C,

at least one of said sensors being equipped with a membrane permeable to gases and impermeable to water for the protection of said sensitive element;

b) an electronic evaluation system capable of

- continuously recording the variations in resistance of the sensitive elements by interaction with MTBE,

20 - comparing the signals emitted by the sensor in the ground and the sensor in the air on the surface of the ground,

- evaluating on the basis of this comparison the presence and concentration of MTBE in the

2007

surface layers or depths of the ground and in the atmosphere above the ground itself.

4. The device according to claim 3, characterized in that the semiconductor metal oxide is tin oxide.

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